

C. VOICES FROM THE PAST: WHAT CAN THEY SAY TO TODAY'S WORLD?

Multi-professor course

Thursdays, 9:30-11:00 a.m. Norris University Center

Throughout history, there have always been keen observers of society who have articulated their thoughts on the human condition and the natural world in writings that have endured over time. Their insightful discourses have often been regarded as wise, prescient, and morally enlightening. Yet, many ideas have also been considered controversial, becoming provocative even into current times. This course will explore a range of thinkers and writers, from the ancient world to the 21st century, and the relevancy of their views to today's turbulent times. Several lecturers will discuss topics relating to economic issues, reflections on power and leadership, and concerns for global public health and the environment. Other classes will explore philosophical thoughts on human nature, communal beliefs, and the ideal of cultural pluralism.

**Jan. 8 "The Unexamined Life is Not Worth Living":
Enduring Questions from the Ancient World**

*Kenneth Seeskin, Philip M. and Ethel Klutznick Professor
Emeritus of Jewish Civilization, Departments of Religious
Studies and Philosophy*

This lecture will explore three themes: (1) Should One Sacrifice Everything for God? Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son at the command of God. What price did he pay for doing so? Was he a hero or a fanatic? What role did Isaac play in his father's decision? Why don't we hear anything from Sarah? (2) Can Virtue be Taught? Socrates spent his whole life trying to decide whether there is a systematic way to ensure that people live moral lives. If it can be taught, who teaches it? Does a good education guarantee proper behavior? Can a person understand the difference between right and wrong and still choose the latter? (3) What is Love? What does a lover see in the loved one? What is the relationship between love of another person and self-love? Can you love a person who has committed evil?

Jan. 15 Niccolò Machiavelli and the Renaissance

*Edward Muir, Clarence L. Ver Steeg Professor in the Arts
and Sciences, Professor of History and Italian*

Perhaps no author has been more abused by his historical reception than Machiavelli, the infamous author of *The Prince* but also a talented playwright, prominent diplomat in the Republic of Florence, and the father of modern political thought. His reputation as a cunning political calculator and advocate of immorality, began shortly after his death in 1527 and led to the censorship of his books. Over the past generation, however, historians have redeemed his reputation based on a keener understanding of his less well-known works, his relentless advocacy of political liberty, and his view that a republic of laws is far superior to the tyranny of autocrats. He has many surprising things to say to our own political world.

**Jan. 22 Two Men Who Brought Down Communism:
Václav Havel and Lech Walesa**

*Benjamin Frommer, Associate Professor and
Associate Chair, History*

In the 1970s and '80s, two very different men became the face of protest in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe. From the industrial city of Gdansk, the electrician Lech Walesa led a workers' movement that challenged and then overthrew communist rule in Poland. From Prague, the playwright Václav Havel, argued for "living the truth" and emerged from prison to lead the 1989 Czechoslovak Velvet Revolution. In time, however, both men learned that politics in a democracy required different skills than leadership of movements for democracy and each found himself transformed from a figure of national unity to an object of partisanship. This lecture will examine the lives of these two extraordinary men from their formative years under communist rule through their experiences as the first post-communist presidents of their respective homelands.

**Jan. 29 To Repair the World: Dr. Paul Farmer, Medical
Anthropologist and Physician**

*Noelle Sullivan, Professor of Instruction and
Ph.D. Director, Program in Global Health Studies,
Anthropology*

Dr. Paul Farmer was a medical anthropologist and physician best known for establishing Partners in Health, a social justice organization with a long history of establishing high quality health care services globally to those most in need. A strong advocate for the universal human right to health, Dr. Farmer's academic and advocacy work demonstrated not only that robust primary health care for the world's poor was necessary, but also, and most importantly, that it was possible to achieve through partnership. This lecture delves into some of Farmer's most important ideas about the kind of world we live in, and the audacity needed to achieve it.

Feb. 5 Dostoevsky and the Materialist World View

*Gary Saul Morson, Lawrence B. Dumas Professor of Arts
and Humanities; Professor, Slavic Languages and Literature*

Dostoevsky understood the consequences of materialism with special profundity, and the Russian experience amply shows he was on to something. How do characters understand a world in which there is nothing beyond the laws of nature, and how have real people responded to it?

Feb. 12 Tolstoy and Authenticity
Gary Saul Morson

Tolstoy above all values authenticity, but he realizes that most people do not actually think through their views. They buy them like a package. What does it mean to think authentically?

Feb. 19 Horace M. Kallen and the Origins of Cultural Pluralism
Daniel Greene, Adjunct Professor, History

In 1906, a graduate student in philosophy at Harvard named Horace M. Kallen chaired the first meeting of Harvard's first Jewish club, the Menorah Association. A new vision for American diversity, which Kallen called "cultural pluralism," emerged from this group as a direct rebuke to the metaphor of America as a melting pot. In rejecting the claim that immigrants had to leave their cultures behind in order to become American, Kallen effectively asked Americans to reconsider that meaning of democracy for a new century.

Feb. 26 In Defense of Environmentalism: Henry David Thoreau and John Muir

Keith Woodhouse, Associate Professor, History

Over the past several decades environmentalism has come under fire on several fronts. Among the key criticisms are that the movement is exclusionary, overly sentimental, and grounded in an outdated view of "nature." This lecture will consider what Henry David Thoreau and John Muir—two formative thinkers now looked on with suspicion—have to tell us about environmentalism's vices and virtues in the twenty-first century.

Mar. 5 Resurgence of Economic Nationalism
Robert Coen, Professor Emeritus, Economics

The growth of world trade and investment following World War II has generated extraordinary prosperity, but it has also caused painful disruptions, particularly displacements of traditional industries and jobs. A backlash to globalization is occurring, with economic nationalism on the rise -- tariffs to keep out imports, subsidies to promote exports, restrictions on foreign investments, withdrawal from international organizations and agreements. An earlier wave of globalization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries ended in a reversion to protectionist policies, the collapse of trade, and the Great Depression. What can we learn from economists who foresaw or studied last century's resurgence of economic nationalism? Voices to be heard will include some familiar ones (e.g., John Maynard Keynes) and some less familiar ones (e.g., Charles P. Kindleberger).